





The CalWORKs Project Six County Case Study

INTRODUCTION

Background of the CalWORKs Project

Welfare Reform

Under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, adults receiving cash assistance through Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF, which replaced the AFDC program) were faced with a new environment. No longer was cash assistance guaranteed without time restrictions. Each participant had an 18-24 month limit to participate in work activities and a total limit of five years on welfare. And, each participant had to engage in a set number of hours of work-related activity in order to receive cash assistance.

Welfare reform heightened the importance of addressing issues and problems of alcohol and other drugs (AOD), mental health (MH), and domestic violence (DV) within the AFDC/TANF population. While estimates of the prevalence of alcohol and other drugs (AOD), mental health (MH), and domestic violence (DV) issues within the TANF population vary, there is general consensus that the rates are higher than in the general population and affect a substantial minority of TANF participants. These issues can create barriers to TANF participants' ability to meet the work activity requirements and to become steadily employed at a level that allows them to be self-sufficient within the time limits.

In recognition of the special problems that would be faced by TANF participants with DV issues, the PRWORA included a Family Violence Option (FVO), which allowed states to exempt survivors of DV from certain of the new TANF rules that might endanger their safety. California adopted the FVO and developed implementation guidelines for counties.

California's implementation legislation of TANF is called CalWORKs (California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids). The CalWORKs legislation created a special allocation that was to be used to address the AOD and MH problems of CalWORKs participants when these problems were barriers to employment. The legislation required county departments of social services (DSS) to enter into contracts or MOUs with county MH systems and with county AOD systems and/or private providers in order to obtain assessments of and services for participants with real or suspected AOD and MH barriers to employment. Because the county DSS was directed to work with the county MH system, the models for identifying and serving participants with AOD and MH barriers to employment reflected an "interagency collaborative" approach.



The CalWORKs Project

The CalWORKs Project is a collaborative effort under the auspices of the California Mental Health Directors Association (CMHDA), County Alcohol and Drug Program Administrators Association of California (CADPAAC), and the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA). All three of the associations have endorsed the Project and have assisted the Project in obtaining funding from the counties. The CalWORKs Project is overseen by the Joint CalWORKs Committee, which includes representatives from all three of these associations.

The CalWORKs Project at the staff level is a collaboration of three organizations:

- **California Institute for Mental Health (CIMH)** – CIMH obtained a grant from the Wellness Foundation in 1997 to determine how California might identify participants with these issues, and to recommend benefits and services that would address the identified needs. A Resource Guide containing information about these issues was produced in 1998.¹
- **Children and Family Futures (CFF)** – CFF received a contract from the State Alcohol and Drug Department to conduct a series of Regional Forums and other technical assistance for counties to assist them in the implementation of the AOD component of CalWORKs. CFF published *Implementing Welfare Reform: Solutions to the Substance Abuse Problems in 1997*.
- **Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPPF)** – The FVPPF had been an active participant in the development of the federal Family Violence Option. They had also developed a campaign “Work to End Domestic Violence,” focused on increasing awareness, prevention, and response to domestic violence in the workplace.

The CalWORKs legislation devolved most of the decisions about the structure and implementation of welfare reform to the counties. This included decisions about how to organize the effort to identify and serve participants with AOD, MH, or DV barriers to employment. The focus of Project work thus moved to the county level where AOD, MH and DSS directors began asking for assistance in how to set up their programs to identify and serve this population.

The CalWORKs Project is designed to gather and disseminate information about: a) the impacts of AOD, MH, and DV issues on CalWORKs participants’ ability to become self sufficient, and b) how best to identify and serve CalWORKs participants having these barriers to employment.

The CalWORKs Project consists of four components:

- **Six County Case Study** – The study is gathering information on CalWORKs in six California counties: Alameda, Kern, Los Angeles, Monterey, Shasta, and Stanislaus. The study is the subject of this report.

¹ Information about the Resource Guide is available on the CIMH website: www.cimh.org.



- **Research** – Funded by a grant from the National Institutes of Justice, the Project is following 880 TANF participants in Kern and Stanislaus counties for a two-year period. At least 180 of the 880 participants will have received either an AOD, MH, or DV service. Information from this project is scheduled for publication summer 2000.
- **Technical Assistance** – Information derived from other Project activities is being shared with counties and others through regional forums, satellite broadcasts, newsletters, a Website, and presentations at conferences.
- **Policy** – Based on what is learned through the other Project activities, policy recommendations are made to federal, state, and county-level policymakers.

Funding for the CalWORKs Project has been received from the following sources:

- The California Wellness Foundation
- The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
- The National Institute of Justice
- Voluntary payments from California counties

Overview of the Six-County Case Study

Rationale for the Case Study Approach

The Six-County Case Study described in this report examined the impact of AOD/MH/DV issues on employability among CalWORKs recipients and assessed the implementations of CalWORKs in the six counties (Alameda, Kern, Los Angeles, Monterey, Shasta, and Stanislaus). A case study methodology was selected for two main reasons: the complexity of the issues, and the exploratory state of knowledge in the field.

As noted above, both the design and implementation of the effort to identify and serve CalWORKs participants with AOD, MH, and DV barriers to employment were left to the counties. Each county faces a unique set of circumstances in terms of its demographic characteristics, the general philosophy and approach to welfare, its history of agency collaborative relationships, its MH/AOD/DV service systems, and other considerations. The Project staff believed that the only way to fully understand the design and implementation of CalWORKs was to study the processes in depth within the particular county circumstances.

The second reason for the case study methodology was that there was little established knowledge about the best way to identify and serve CalWORKs participants with AOD, MH, and DV barriers to employment. The Project staff believed that creative ideas would come from the field and that tracking county efforts over time would yield useful information about what did and did not work.



The six counties were selected based on their interest in participating. Three counties, Kern, Monterey, and Stanislaus, had done considerable early planning. The other three, Alameda, Los Angeles, and Shasta, were added to ensure balance in terms of size and location in the state.

Of the six counties, five have a combined AOD and MH administrative structure, while one, Los Angeles, has two separate departments. In the state as a whole, fifty-five percent (55%) of the counties have a combined administrative structure. Even when the administrative structure is combined, the actual service systems and programs may operate quite separately.

Sources of Information Used in the Six-County Case Study

Site Visits – The site visits were the most critical of the information sources during the initial 18 months of the Project. Anywhere from two to five Project staff spent at least four, and as many as eight days on-site in each county. All counties received at least two site visits. Each site visit included interviews with:

- County Administrative Office
- Directors, managers, and line staff of the county departments involved in CalWORKs (including the eligibility and the employment services components) and the AOD and MH support services
- AOD, MH, and DV providers
- Joint Training Partnership Agencies/Private Industry Councils (JTPA/PIC) agencies and others involved in Department of Labor Welfare-to-Work Program
- Representatives of children and family services in Child Welfare and in the MH and AOD agencies
- Advocacy groups and other community-based organizations with a stake or role in welfare reform

The interviews during the site visits were semi-structured allowing sufficient time for the exploration of issues that the interviewees thought were important. A meeting of representatives from the six counties in March 1999 identified the critical elements in the success of their efforts to-date and the kinds of barriers they had faced. They also identified what they anticipated would fall into these categories in the future. This information helped to frame how the vast amount of information from the site visits was construed.

Surveys of DSS Staff – A second source of data is the questionnaires filled out by 793 DSS eligibility workers and 340 employment counselors in five of the six counties (Alameda was not



included in this part of the study).² Response rates varied by county and are described in Appendix A. The surveys queried staff about the impacts of welfare reform on their jobs; the amount and helpfulness of training received on AOD, MH, and DV issues and procedures for identification and referral; how comfortable and prepared they felt they were to deal with AOD, MH, and DV issues with their participants; the number of referrals they had made in the last three months; their satisfaction with certain parts of the identification and referral process; and whether their participants who had completed services had been helped. Many staff provided useful perspectives in the comments they made on the surveys.³

Surveys of Clients of AOD, MH, and DV Services – The third information source was surveys of 591 current clients of AOD, MH and DV services in four of the six counties (Alameda and Monterey were not included in this part of the study). The four counties provided Project staff with lists of open client episodes in the summer and fall of 1999. The providers with larger numbers of clients were sampled in roughly proportionate numbers to the numbers of clients they were serving and asked to distribute the surveys to clients as they came in for services. Clients were encouraged to complete the forms, seal them, and put them in a box on the receptionist's desk. The surveys asked clients about their satisfaction with services; how they got to the services; whether the services helped them get or keep a job; whether they are getting other services they need; and how helpful the services have been in dealing with the CalWORKs program.

Surveys of Providers of AOD, MH, and DV Services – The fourth source of information is surveys completed by AOD, MH, and DV providers about clients who had completed services. The same four counties as above were involved in this part of the study. The sample comprised the most recent discharges, in rough proportion to the total number of discharges during FY 1998-99 (when known). Providers were asked to rate the amount of change in the client on selected dimensions during the course of services; the reasons for the service episode ending; and the collaboration with CalWORKs staff, if any.

Management Information System Data on AOD and MH Services – The final information source is the management information systems of the county MH and AOD systems as well as some information about DV services from the Los Angeles County Domestic Violence Unit within the Department of Community and Senior Services. The information portrays the demographic and clinical characteristics of the TANF population being served in FY 1997-98 and 1998-99 as well as data on the amounts and kinds of services received. These systems are limited in their capacities to generate information relevant to the new interagency world of CalWORKs supportive services. This part of the study also gave us first-hand information about the MIS problems (discussed in Chapter VI of the report).

² A summary of the methodology and response rates for all of the surveys can be found in the supplementary report, *Results of Surveys of CalWORKs Staff, CalWORKs Participants Receiving AOD/MH/DV Services, and AOD/MH/DV Staff Evaluations of Discharged AOD/MH/DV Clients*.

³ Many of the comments from each of the surveys are printed in the supplementary report.



Elements of the Report

Chapter Organization and Topics

The six chapters of the report present descriptive information about the six counties in the case study with each chapter focusing on different issues as described below.

Chapter I presents information on the context within which the efforts to identify and serve TANF participants with AOD, MH, and DV barriers to employment were designed and implemented.

Chapter II deals with the issue of identification and referral to assessment and/or services of CalWORKs participants with AOD, MH, or DV barriers to employment. It includes information on the ways in which the identification, assessment, and referral effort is structured and on the various strategies used by the counties to enhance identification and referral of CalWORKs participants with these issues.

Chapter III presents information about the ways in which AOD, MH, and DV services are being delivered. It discusses the various structure and functions of integrated teams; the ways in which the six counties have relied on existing service providers; and the nature and extent of new services or expanded service capacity developed.

Chapter IV presents information on the numbers of clients being served and some of the characteristics of those clients. It also contains information on what we know about the effectiveness of these services as rated by employment counselors, the providers of the services, and the clients themselves.

Chapter V highlights how AOD, MH, and DV issues and systems relate to the coordination of CalWORKs with two other important systems: child welfare and workforce development. One perhaps unanticipated consequence of welfare reform has been to spotlight the need for greater coordination between CalWORKs and child welfare – two parts of the same county DSS that traditionally have had little relationship. Similarly, the Department of Labor's Welfare-to-Work program that funds local Private Industry Councils (PICs) to assist the hardest-to-serve CalWORKs participants to find and keep jobs has pushed the coordination between CalWORKs and the workforce development system who are serving an overlapping population. The chapter explores briefly these relationships and how AOD, MH, and DV have or have not been a part of the growing collaborations.

Chapter VI presents information on two critical infrastructure issues: funding and information systems. This chapter is fairly brief partly because of the dearth of information and partly because it was not a high focus of our efforts during this first part of the Project. We anticipate devoting more attention to these issues in the coming year.



Chapters II and III include a list of Promising Practices that are policies and activities that *appear* to be reasonable and useful based on observation during the site visits. Since we do not have objective data that can confirm our impressions, we call them “promising.” Each of these chapters also includes a set of “Issues to Consider” which provide the elements that the Project staff think are important for counties to review should they decide to implement any of the approaches.

Generic Terms Used in the Report

The six counties use different terms for different parts of their system. To assist the reader we have taken what we consider to be the most generic of terms and applied them to maintain consistency throughout the report. The most important of these are:

- **DSS – Department of Social Services** – referred to in some of the counties as “Community Services Agency,” “Department of Human Services,” “Department of Public Social Services.” This is the umbrella department or agency within which CalWORKs resides.
- **EW and EC – eligibility worker and employment counselor** – EWs are sometimes referred to as “eligibility technicians.” Employment counselors are also known as “employment coordinators,” “GAIN workers,” and “employment and training workers.”
- **AOD and MH – alcohol and other drugs and mental health** – Some counties refer to AOD as “substance abuse” and some refer to AOD and MH as “behavioral health.”
- **DV – domestic violence** – referred to by some counties as “domestic abuse.”

We note other terminology simplification or abbreviations as they occur within the body of the report.

Terms Specific to CalWORKs Used in the Report

Welfare reform introduced its own terminology, some of which is a simple replacement of prior terms, and some of which reflects altered meanings. Unfortunately, there is not consistent usage of the terms in the field. We use the following terms in the following way:

- **CalWORKs recipient** – anyone who is receiving cash or other assistance that makes them an official CalWORKs case with “the welfare time clock ticking.”
- **CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work participant** – any adult who is enrolled in CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work, i.e. anyone who is not exempt from the CalWORKs work activity requirements. In practice there are numerous CalWORKs recipients who are neither enrolled in CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work nor exempt, but are somewhere in the process of becoming enrolled in CalWORKs or are in the sanctioning process. CalWORKs



Welfare-to-Work replaces GAIN but with a different set of rules and requirements. All CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work participants are supposed to have a Welfare-to-Work (WTW) Plan that specifies how they are meeting their work related activity requirements.

- **Exempt participant** – any adult who is receiving CalWORKs cash assistance who has been officially exempted from CalWORKs work activity requirements. Exempt adults are not eligible for supportive services.⁴ There are six general categories of exemptions: age 60 or over, verified disability, caretaker of incapacitated household member that impairs participation, primary caretaker of child under 6 months, pregnancy that impairs ability to participate, non-parent relative caring for child who is a ward of the court or at risk of placement out of home.
- **Sanctioned participant** – an adult who because of a sanction is no longer receiving the adult portion of the CalWORKs cash grant. These cases are called “child only.”⁵ Adults who are no longer receiving cash assistance are not eligible for supportive services. Some counties are attempting to reach out to the population that has been sanctioned in an effort to resolve the sanction. Participants can be reinstated once the sanction issue is resolved and may receive supportive services while in the process of “curing” the sanction.
- **Welfare-to-Work (WTW) Plan and Welfare-to-Work (WtW) programs** – WTW is the plan that is developed by the participant and the employment counselor that specifies the participant’s work-related activities. WtW is the name given to Department of Labor funded programs to provide additional assistance to those CalWORKs participants who are hardest to serve. These programs are generally run by or through the local Private Industry Councils (PIC) or Joint Training Partnership Agencies (JTPA). Despite the similarity in name, these are entirely different concepts. Each CalWORKs participant has a Welfare-to-Work (WTW) Plan. Only a few receive the type of assistance offered through the Department of Labor-funded Welfare-to-Work (WtW) programs.
- **Support services** – includes the array of services that are available to CalWORKs participants to allow them to participate in required work-related activities. They include childcare and transportation as well as the AOD, MH, and DV services that are the focus of this report. We do not use the term “support services” for the AOD, MH, and DV services since it has this broader connotation in most counties.
- **Screening, assessment, and appraisal** – Screening refers to the systematic use of simple, brief, inexpensive tests that indicate the need for further diagnostic work-up for AOD, MH, or DV issues. For purposes of this report, we have considered only those instruments that are routinely used with every CalWORKs participant as screening instruments. Assessment refers to the longer process conducted by a trained AOD, MH,

⁴ Exempt recipients in Los Angeles County are eligible for county-funded DV services.

⁵ Cases with non-needy and unqualified payees are also referred to as “child only.”



or DV clinician or expert that determines the nature and extent of the issue and that leads to a recommendation about the kind and type of services that are appropriate. Appraisal refers to one of the steps in the CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work process and refers generally to vocational issues; we do not use this term in relationship to AOD, MH, or DV issues.

AOD/MH/DV Services and CalWORKs – An Experimental Approach

The report attempts to reflect the wisdom and experience of the staff in the field who are committed to assisting CalWORKs participants overcome AOD, MH, and DV barriers to employment.

The effort to identify and serve CalWORKs participants with AOD, MH, and DV barriers to employment has created challenges for every part of the service system. Amidst major change to their usual roles, managers and line staff additionally had to learn about other parts of the service system. DSS eligibility workers and employment counselors have learned about AOD, MH and DV issues and how to make referrals for services. AOD, MH, and DV providers have learned about many of the intricacies of the welfare system as well as how to adjust their services to address the employability issues that are the immediate concern to CalWORKs.

Because of the newness of this effort, there are no proven models to follow. The Project staff has been consistently impressed with how creative, persistent, and flexible managers and line staff have been as they have learned new concepts and approaches, developed new relationships, and worked through obstacles. This has been a major “trial and error” effort with much adjustment along the way.

This report should be viewed within this context. Not everything is working optimally at this stage of the process. The Project hopes that the observations in this report will assist the staff in the six counties, as well as others, to continue the *ongoing evolution* of efforts to help CalWORKs participants overcome AOD, MH, and DV barriers to attaining and retaining employment.

